VARIANT
73 ROBERTSON STREET
GLASGOW G2 8QD
SCOTLAND
TEL: 041-221 6380
FAX: 041-221 7775

31 May 1993

Jim Kelman
551 Alexandra Parade
Dennistoun
Glasgow

Jim,

Much to my annoyance, I missed your talk at the A Summer School on Chomsky and the Media. What did you make of the Mark Achbar film? A great piece of cheap programming for Channel 4.

Re' our conversation in the Clutha on Saturday night - this is to confirm that it was not the drink talking shite on my part (for a change) and that I'd be very keen for you to do a review on the CAH book. As I said, I've been trying to find someone to do this for some time. The specifications are: 750 words approx. deadline the third week in June, is £50, payable within 1 month of publication.

The discussion between yourself and John La Rose is provisional for issue 16 insofar as it would be good to have another chat about this and confirm the details etc. I'd be interested in sitting in on it at some point too, which also gives me an excuse to get to London again. All we need to do here is map out the rough terrain on issues to be covered, but the whole point of the 'discussion' should not be proscribed by myself, you would have a free hand and certainly will not be constrained or edited on the basis of particular points of view or issues.

I'll give you a call in the next couple of days and perhaps we could meet up soon.

Best wishes,

4/11/93

Dear Sim,

Here is the first edit. I'd be grateful if you could check it for major ommissions + inaccuracies. It hasn't been proofread yet + the second half of it still needs cutting down extensively.

The introduction should give biog details, mentioning foundation of CAM + New Beacon + John's involvement in political struggles in Caribbean + Venezuala, which are ommitted from the interview. Other aspects not covered in this version are the tradition of the Carnival + the subversive nature of Ska + Reggae etc.. The influence of John + CAM upon the younger generation of black activists + artists should also be acknowledged.

The intro will also mention that the interview will be available as a book let, perhaps under the ausspices of 'Artists in Solidarity'.

I'm sorry if this is a bit vague + don't feel 'lumbered' with the intro since I will do it if time doesn't permit. I think you might be better at making the links.

Anyway, speak to you soon.

Best wishes

Mark

P.S. disk enclosed.

Dear Jim,

The enclosed hasn't been corrected on this copy. Will talk on Thursday.

Best

Mark

Jim Kelman: One of the things I think that would be really good to start from is a very crucial thing in part of the thinking behind CAM, in the lead up to setting up the Carribean Artist's Movement. Now the idea of - how crucial it is to have the indidgenous aesthetic; to have criticism coming from your own culture and your own community - how important that is. I regard that as a real fundemental thing, and also to some extent, when one talks about culture & politics: that's the sort of question which shows in fact that there's no seperation. Because once you're talking about that sort of cultural identity - indidgenous culture etc - that's politics.

John La Rose: Well first about publishing. For me publishing is an important element in the autonomy of culture, because it meant that prior to our work in publishing, people were published abroad by the English publishers. I particularly became interested in publishing because of a friend of mine, John Wickham whom we subsequently published. He wrote beautiful short stories & plays, which he'd done on the radio in Trinidad. He came to London with his novel and he could'nt get a publisher. So I said that this is a serious matter because it would not be of interest to an English publisher but it would certainly be of interest to us, and therefore we ought to be able to publish our own material if its important to our own culture. And that's the autonomy of publishing, I recognised that at that particular stage. I really began to recognise the autonomy of publishing validating a culture for itself. Ofcourse I thought of it in Trinidad - we had no money but we thought of it - there were all these people publishing small books & pamphlets, literature, poetry, short stories & so on: and there's still a lot of that, what people called self-publishing, samizdat, in the Caribbean. In Trinidad I had known a lot of Venezualan friends, who were themselves writers, one of them, Raphael Carainis [?] he is my good comrade and talked a lot about prose & poetry.

JK: What age were you at that time, getting into Venezuala?

JLR: That's in the 50's, late 40's: Raphael had been a student at the University of Caracas and he was expelled because of the student revolt against Peres Imalius [?], the dictator of Venezuala at the time. When I got to Venezuala they had something called Tabla re donda - a group of artists coming together, people of my age at the time - and the idea behind that was to publish their own journa l and their own writing. The way they did that was to sell coupons to friends and they'd get the book at a cheaper rate on the basis of the coupons, and then they'd have a launch. But they were all very well known intellectual figures, even although they were very young. They were in journalism, literature & teaching, all of them in politics. Venezuala is a very political place: so you were either in Action Democratica or you were in the Communist Party or a kind of Liberal Democratic Party. That was a great influence on me really: seeing how they could do it, & how

essential it was that they should do it. Because you see, at that time in South America, in Central America, there were two main publishing centres, one was in Mexico City and the other was in Buenos Aires. There were no other main publishing centres, so if you were a Spanish/American writer you'd be either published in Mexico or Argentina. Having seen all this my idea was we should really get into publishing ourselves. But I could'nt quite do it at first because we did'nt have the money to do it, and eventualy when I got here ~~I came here~~ in 61 - I think I'd better give you the joke: I was working as a Brickie's Labourer.

JK: In the Barbican, some of the best paid companies you were working for - Laings and all.

JLR: ~~I worked for John Laings,~~ that's right: we were building the headquarters of BP and I fell off a platform, almost broke my back, I was lucky I did'nt. I know the date because it was the same day Carmin Crewman [?] fell from power, February 24th, I fell from that place. Eventually I got a bit of money, I'd worked as an insurance executive in Trinidad and organised the whole case and took it to the Solicitors who acted on my behalf, and so the money from the fall came and with that I began publishing.

JK: An out of court settlement?

JLR: Ofcourse, about £500, ~~and with that I was determined~~ to go into publishing.

~~JK: Quite a lot of dough in 61.~~

~~JLR:~~ So that's how I got into publishing. I think the first book was my own book called 'Nations', which cost me about £300. Luckily Sarah's father was assistant secretary at the Arts council with Maynard Keynes, and he was in touch with an awful lot of writers, authors, and one day I saw a series of special publications, you know: you have a number of people round the world who would want Ted Hughes or Edward Luce Smith for example and I liked the publication work and asked who did it. It turned out to be a man called John Sankie, Delius Publications, I went to see him and he's remained our printer ever since

JK: There's an interesting point here. You know Edward Luce Smith, one of the people involved with him at that time was Philip Hobsbaum, he's Proffesor of Literature at Glasgow University and organised writers groups, he did them in ireland, he got together with Shamus Heany and various people and he also did the same in Glasgow. That was where I first met Tom Leonard, Alisdair Grey & Liz Lochead.

JLR: I knew Philip Hobsbaum's name, but never knew him, Eric Hobsbaum I know; Its interesting to see his influence in Glasgow with yourselves.

JK: It was basically just as a mediator, somewhere you met artists.

JLR: That kind of role, ofcourse, we also played in founding CAM, Eddie Kamau Brathwaite, Andrew Salkey and myself. I knew Eddie - Kamau he calls himself nowadays - by his reputation. I had seen his work in a journal called BIM, published in Barbados; he had seen my work in Jamiaca, one long poem that I had at the end of 'Foundations' called 'Song to an imperishable sunlight'. When we met in London he thought I was doing what he was doing, he was then working on this long poem, which became a trilogy, 'Rites of passage', the very first, beautiful exciting work. He had already finished that & it was about to be published here in London by Oxford University Press. And so we talked about various things: also, I had had these ideas ever since I came here and when I met Wilson Harris. I had known him through his work. In 53 the Government of Giana was overthrown, Pep Chelli Jagad's [?] government, and we had a close relationship, a party relationship with that Government, I was General Secretary of the West Indian Independence Party and Chelli [?] was the leader of the PPP, the People's Progressive Party. They won 18 out of 24 seats in the election and suddenly it created a crisis for the British Government. The result of it was they sent in the Black Watch to overthrow the Governmen. We had sent some of our comrades into the contry to find out what was happening, in what they called the Mazaroni Concentration Camp where people had been put. One of the comrades, a writer himself, went into the country and he came back with Wilson's, 'Eternity to Season', which we subsequently published. It is such a marvelous work of poetry that we were absolutely astonished, because we did'nt know that there was that kind of writing taking place in Giana. So that work of Wilson's was very important to us. When we met in England we had a very close relationship. One of the things I remember talking to him about was that I thought there was a need to bring artists and writers together, because there was so many of them around in Britain. Eventually when I met Eddie in 66, & talked about this we both agreed upon it immediately. I said I knew Wilson and [C L R] James extremely well personally and Andrew Salkey who was working at the BBC as a freelance.

JK: Yeah, I remember what Salkey says about himself, he calls himself a 'Donkey' or something. Part of what he was really good at was introducing people. He regarded that as a very important thing. Also ofcourse he had this wide, wide extensive network.

JLR: Especially because of his work at the BBC at the Caribbean Service. He has worked with Naipal in the Carribbean

Service, before Niapal had had his work published. So it was that kind of relationship he had had with a lot of writers, with George Lamming in the Carribbean Service of the BBC: they all used the BBC as a way of surviving and being culturaly active at the same time, so Andrew had all these writers and the Latin American and African writers, he interviewed lots of them for the World Service. I had met Andrew through going to a talk by C L R James. I knew who he was & he knew who I was and so introduced ourselves to each other. By the time I had met with Kamal and began talking about all this, it was very easy to contact Andrew and then to respond. Andrew had been through so many things and had always felt, well it's a good idea but nothing may happen. But he nevertheless would give his support and solidarity and active assistance and that's what he did. It was really a coming-together of these three people who were really devoted to writing about Caribbean culture and the society and so on.

JK: The good thing that Andrew Salkey said in reference to when he was in University was he'd also devised an alternative strategy of education for himself, because he wanted to write this long poem for Jamaican people, he wanted to write in a language that his own people could read and connect with. Again it's part of that similar kind of thing coming from Brathwaite.

JLR: We're talking about 1966 here. By 62 Jamiaca & Trinidad had become independent, so it's four years after independence that we're talking about.
The modern caribbean has to be seen in terms of the struggle between 35 & 38: now I was very much part of that understanding of it politically, in the way that Andrew & Eddie were not, but they were quite willing to understand it in all its particular nuances. In our study groups we had gone into all the details of 'Labour in the West Indies' promoted by Arthur Lewis Warner, who won the Nobel Prize, we knew of our own battles in the 40's and it was only ten years after that that we were involved in a massive struggle ourselves. But going through the thing we saw all the details of those struggles of the unemployed and the workers, we'd work out theoreticaly that these things <u>begin with the unemployed</u> who are in direct confrontation with the State, and subsequently the organised workers get involved in those struggles, it's not the other way around. And because of that theoretical position, which we'd learned from 'Labour in the West Indies', I understood it here, in relation to Black Unemployed & the State & the White Working Class & the Black Working Class in British Society. So we were able to transfer our understanding of that expierience in the Caribbean to our understanding of politics in British society: because people regarded people as lumpen proletariat, in fact they are not that. Whatever Marx may have said, they are not that. They are a very active source of struggle and change in all societies; and we saw it in France & we saw it in the Caribbean, later on for example in the big revolts in

Martineque. It started off with a white guy killing a black worker or something like that - that's how it starts - that was a tinderbox of racial resentment of unemployment & so on, like in Ireland.

JK: Was Frantz Fanon in Martineque at that time ?

JLR: No, he would'nt have been there then, he had already been in Algeria, but nevertheless he would have sensed that, because we were already changing the way, we still have changed the way people see these unemployeds in modern societies. When you live in a colony like we lived, you have a high percentage of permanent unemployment, and I learned a lot about that because it is they who created the Black Autonomous Church that challenged the established Church in the Caribbean. You see, Butler, who led the 1937 revolt in Trinidad was a Baptist Preacher. He was therefore not an established Church man, it's a Black Church with the Black Workers in the South in the Oil Industry that he worked with to get this revolt going: he worked within three concentrics: first he was Grenadian, there was a lot of illeagal Grenadians who got into the country to work, then he was a Baptist Preacher and then he was a militant workers leader in the south against the Oil Industry employers. I understood all that from my study of the Caribbean struggle for independence and socialism, which is what we were involved in, in the late 40's. I brought that understanding beyond which Andrew - because Andrew left as a young man - it appears to me that Eddie was also very culturaly orientated, but in a very national way, when he talks about himself, his interest in Jazz, which when he came to Cambridge they could'nt understand: this was condemned as quite a revolutionary thing - for this young up-coming Black middle-class boy to be interested in Jazz, and so he was obviously interested in the popular culture. Now that is'nt as pronounced in Barbados as it is in Trinidad because we always had very strong elements of the popular culture there Kaiso, Carnival, Steel Bands, all those elements plus a lot of language which is popular culture language. You see it in Naipaul and in Selvon, it's all there in the language: so when we got together we were 'really grooving together'.
For me with the expierience of CAM: there are two major expieriences in my own political life in the Caribbean and in Venezuala. Venezuala was important for me too because I lived there at the time when Fidel Castro was coming to power & I was involved in that business, and, in a way, that was even stronger than the kind of politics we were making in Trinidad, because they had to be a revolutionary politics of a very advanced kind. When I left Venezuala they were preparingto enter the guerilla struggles at that time. When fidel came to Venezuala in 59, I'd been there for about 6 months.

JK: Is that refered to in Cheddi Jagan's biography ?

JLR: Ye , Cheddi came w n I was there & I introduced him to various people, because he was trying to come to terms with the problems of the rice Indo trinad the Federation leaders were trying to tell him to come and enter the Federation and he was finding it very difficult, because the Indians did'nt want to enter the Federation. They saw themselves being swamped by these Africans in the Islands : that's the central political mistake Cheddi made. Nevertheless he came there to sell rice and I was able to help him to sell the rice to keep his government going, because he was under pressure from the British Government, the States and from the Federation leaders.

So with that, coming to England in 61 it meant that I brought all that experience. CAM was a very significant experience because of the fact that this was a movement that sought to deal with the artist as a totally vulnerable person engaged with other artists in a very vulnerable way; and that kind of engagement had been unusual in Caribbean society and that made the experience extremely valuable in elucidating our own lives as individuals & as artists, as people involved in politics & so on - because we would have these long nights of discussion. Cabral [?] says, 'it begins with culture & it ends with culture', with CAM we always began with culture, in the sense that it was a cultural subject of discussion, but it took in everything so that when we had a private discussion subsequent to the public discussion, we would need to talk about literature, politics, music, culture, everything in society. And in talking about everything we were exploring ourselves, exploring society & societies. Coming from the Caribbean you had a really great experience of societies, in Trinidad we have the Chinese, French Creoles who came with the French Revolution from within the Caribbean to Trinidad, we have the Spaniards who had been original conquerors of the Indians in Trinidad, we have the English who took over from the Spaniards, then we have the Africans who were brought to work on the plantations - although we're not a classic plantation society like Barbados or Jamaica - what happened was because of the need for labour after 1838, and slavery comes to an end, and we had the first Chinese who were brought to work on the plantations and we had the Indians. I grew up seeing Syrians selling cloth and I went to school with them, all these peoples which most you were really familiar, I'm very familiar with Indian society, I have a feeling of growing up with it, that's what's so peculiar about it all. I was taught by an Irish Priest, he taught me Greek at St. Mary's College in Trinidad, I hadn't known white people attacking other white people, but here was this man attacking the English for the Black & Tans - he was obviously an Irish Nationalist - I didn't know that white people could talk about other white people like that, the idea was that it was black people who were like that, you know, "black & chicken ain't do nothing", those kind of self-deprecatory, self-contemptuous sayings which have been imposed on society: but the revolutionary movement & the cultural movement weakens all these things, all the time,

everytime it moves forward - it shows that it's not true: we can do these things, we can deal with the British. 1903 was a situation where we almost had power in our hands in Trinidad. The place where the Government had its seat of power, the Red House, it was totally burned down in the riots, the government was tacced. There's a Kiaso about it.

JC: One of the things about the publishing side of it, is it's like rediscovering the radical history and your own history in publishing.

JLR: That was very much part of what we were doing, we were doing it very actively as a political movement involved in popular culture. Popular culture in Trinidad, the Kiasos in particular, do make reference to all these events in our society. For example, there was a big march to Pinefore in the Port of Spain led by Butler in the 1940's. In those days transport wasn't easy from one end of the island to the other, & they marched for 70 miles into the Port of Spain to protest what the government was doing in the Oil Industry & so on. They got into the Port of Spain and invaded the Red House & after that they went round to the Govenor's House and there's a Kiaso about it: "The man in the garden hiding, hiding from Butler,o come outside Mister come outside", that's the Govenor they're talking about, "Oh come outside Mister, come outside, Mister do not hide, oh come outside, Butler want to bust your ah ha!" You couldn't say bust your arse in the Kiaso so: "Butler want to bust your ah ha". Our Kiasos do incorporate all that experience from 1925 when we had our first elections on a limited basis. We have "Who you voting for Sibrianos [?]", Sibrianos was the leader of the Labour Party in those days. We had old Working Men's associations and then the Labour Party. We were part of the International Working Men's Movement as were all the movements ~~in~~ in the Caribbean in the 20's.

JC: They were crucial things, you had them in various places, London & Glasgow, New York: books were available so you could go in there & read things.

JLR: Once had been the Trinidad W.I.A., which subsequently became the Trinidad Labour Party. They all that history extremely well, both in terms of oral history & I also made a special study of it in our Libraries, we had a Trinidad Public Library since it something: they had the West Indian section in the Public library - that's where the West Indian books were kept!

JC: We have Scottish sections in our Libraries in Scotland just now. And in the bookshops! Our own Bookshops genre-ize our own culture.

JLR: I didn't realise how funny that was until much later, but in the West Indian section I was able to go & read &

extensively borrow books, I did a comprehensive study of all that for quite some time, as part of the political, cultural work we were doing: this included a production of a poetry reading in the Library, you'd be surprised that one of the books I was looking for was by Rabindranath Tagore, he was quite famous among us. I couldn't get this particular book by Tagore, the 'Katanjali' [?] till a friend who was the Deputy High Commissioner for India in Trinidad got me a copy for the poetry reading. It really meant that when we came together in 1951 we got a lot together.

JK: It's also the organising, you're bringing this tremendous organising experience from various things, which is crucial.

JLR: You see Eddie had been to Africa after he left Cambridge. He got this job in Ghana, it was that that made him understand the tradition of African society & the caribbean the way he understands it & writes about it in his books. He was also involved in the education movement & he wrote a play for schools, very much used in Ghana. Although he had done history at Cambridge he was also very interested in literature, he is still regarded as a historian but he's really more interested in comparative literature and histories.

JK: The key term you're using, 'comparative'. With you & Andrew Salkey & C.K.Brathwaite, apart from the fact that there's all these different societies, you're from 3 different countries basically - so you're bringing a whole kind of range of different ways of working in comparison.

JLR: But you see there was a common experience coming from those islands, which had to do with the fact that we were colonial territories of Britain, fighting against British colonial domination, what we called battleship democracy. They weren't as activly involved in that because they left younger than I left the caribbean: I left when I was 21, Eddie at 18 & Andrew at a similar age to. I was much more formed within the caribbean experience than they had been. Nevertheless they had been attached to that experience all along - both in terms of their study & their work.

JK: And they were anti-assimilation as well.

JLR: That's right, they weren't for that. Not only that but Andrew & Eddie came from very interesting families. In Barbados there's a house called the Bay House, where Eddie grew up - it's in all of his poems - the sea's at the back of it ? the Roman Catholic Cathedral on the opposite side of the road. That's where he grew up as a young person. His Grandfather lived inside the country, Barbados is a small place but it's the country which they're concerned, & it's in all the poems. Eddie's sister wrote a piece, there was a celebration for him recently at the Community College in New York, & his sister, called Kay Morgan, wrote a very brilliant piece on Eddie's

work; sharing all the references from the place: the genius loci, it's all there & she knows it. No other literacy critic could pick that up, but she describes it ~~in~~ with great intensity.

I would think that coming here to England: firstly none of us were starry-eyed about Britain. I knew a lot about British history, I was anti-colonial. I knew of Churchill & his courruption & all his family in the cabinet, things of that sort. There's nothing here to impress me, I wasn't impressionable about British society. I was very detached, looking to understand more of this colonial experience out of British society. I made contacts as you know, from the top to the bottom of British society. Just like I did when I lived in Venezuela. I mean I had meetings with the President right down to the bottom of the people, I had all these connections, because I genuinely wanted to understand the nature of this colonial experience & how it had affected us & colonial societies, culturally, politically, socially in all kinds of ways; & what that interaction means, & we were doing all that here, exploring all of that all the time within CAM - exploring it in terms of the writers & their writing.

JK: We were talking about the autonomy of New Beacon. There's a kind of related thing that I've found an exciting notion about what you've been involved in, the way I've interpreated what you've been doing & thinking about it. Besides being a publisher & writer you're creating a whole autonomous community, in the sense that you have the publisher, you have the writers with luck you have a sympathetic printer, you have the shop - to sell the work, you're creating you're own customers. So there's a complete self-sufficientcy within this, this in a sense is the ideal.

JLR: It happened by chance. Firstly my going into book publishing was not by chance but the question of book selling was by chance: partly because of the fact that here in London all the books I wanted to get & read, there was no place I could buy them. So I decided at some stage that we would really do the international book service. That was the very first book service of its kind ever done from the Caribbean. I was a Caribbean specialist so it meant that I did a booklist in French, Spanish & English. The very first catalogues we sent internationally to everywhere, so it meant that people came to here all the time, this was still in the 60's, people came to downstairs here. I talked to so many people writing their Phd's or post-doctorate research for hours downstairs. It was that kind of place. It was a home but you couldn't just walk in, you had to get permission to enter & once you entered you were made comfortable. These were friends really & they came from , Africa, the Caribbean, Asia: but they were all Caribbeanists, some were Africanists. So it was that kind of international connection we built right here in this house. The book selling was partly encouraged by CAM because at that stage there were new writers being published every now & then. Some

of the sessions involved discussing the new work, some of the session might have been private but it was always a free autonomous thing. It's a question of interacting with ideas & personalities. People should not suppress what they think for this or that reason. Encouraging free & open discussion was a very important part of what we were doing. And in a certain sense you're making yourself vulnerable by discussing all you think personally, your own feelings, which is important for the artist - to talk about your feelings & intuitions as well.

JK: So that vulnerability is almost a contradiction of what society in Britain is. It's a real kind of anathema to what Britain is.

JLR: And we really made an intimate relationship among ourselves, but it was not a constraining relationship, it allowed for - the phrase I used - 'free development of free individuals', which is a famous Marx phrase, that's what was happening within CAM.

JK: Would that be one of the reasons why it was so attractive to so many people ? One of the things again that I found exciting about it was the cross-generational thing: you had the young Ngugi, Linton Kwesi Johnson & Darcus Howe, a lot of young people, & you also had C.L.R. James being excited by it, who was 40 or 50 years older. Thinking about the kind of influence you can infer about what Ngugi has been doing in & out of Kenya, & also what L.K. Johnson was doing in his poetry, & also moving into the 70's, the different things they were involved in having derived in a way from much of the ideas & interplay of CAM - cultural activists; but also there was the political side after CAM terminated.

JLR: Linton was involved with CAM in a way that Darcus was'nt, they became involved with us post-CAM, but they understood and valued the experience.

JK: Which also includes an organising capacity, seeing an organising potential & strategy.

JLR: Correct & it really makes politics, culture, social life into one.

JK: You see, I felt in my own case, that that was missing in Scotland. It was the organisation that was missing. There was a lot of kind of tentative good things going on. You had writers conferences in the mid-70's, various things were happening in the 60's. But these organisational & comparative things: this crucial thing about how do things go on in other societies, what these people have been involved in. All these things are so necessary.

JLR: It's strange but we always thought highly of the Russian writers, we felt a distance of geography only. My personal

interests were in music & literature & I came across Gorky quite young when I was about 13. I had never read anything like Gorky short stories. Later on when I was interested in music in a much more serious way, I was very interested in what are called the 'Nationalist 5', Russian composers, Borodin, Mussorgsky, I became very interested in what these composers were saying. How it subsequently connected me up with the meaning of the Russian revolution. Sarah [La Rose] was researching the reception of Darwinism in Russia in the 19th

JK: I read a biography of Sunyiat Sen [?] about the same time, what in fact they did was incredible. But again it's this organisation, looking at the way they organised.

JLR: We had a direct link with Sunyiat Sen in Trinidad through a man called Akan Chen [?], a Trinidadian Chinese who'd left to go to China and was part of Sunyat Sen's movement he became the Foriegn Minister. Ofcourse we knew a lot about what was going on in India, because the Indian Congress movement sent a representitive to Trinidad, wherever there was these overseas Indian populations they sent them. So in Trinidad people knew about the Congress movement.

JK: The same in South Africa.

JLR: Like with Ghandi yes. We knew about the Congress movement& what they were fighting for, the fact that people were being banned from going to one place & another. If you

read something which we published not long ago about the history of the Negro Welfare & Cultural Associations: it's about movements I connected up with after reading Maxton's 'Life of Lenin'. I went looking for these organisations, looking for the study group movements & so on. Eventually we formed a connection with the remnants of the Negro Welfare Cultural Association, they had been the organisation which had been organising the workers & the unemployed in the north of Trinidad, joining up in the 1937 General Strike. They had this connection whereby they knew what was going on in the Indian struggle for independence, one got that kind of information second-hand, I didn't read Nehru or Gandi's books. So we were really connecting up with all that was going on in the rest of the world. For example I was the chairman of the committee for the release of political prisoners in Kenya, when they were struggling with the Mau Mau in Kenya. We identified with the Mau Mau struggle, we were getting information on it through the Communist party in England, we were pretty well informed about India too from the Indian Communist Movement, there was all that behind us.

JK: It was a good influence from India, the influence of various people in exile in the States etc. I was just thinking of moving back into the post-CAM period. There was a good statement you made: "the time is over, there was a communion, we should'nt worry about that, that's how it goes, there's something else we can develop - the embers from the fire." And I'm looking from the outside but there seems to have been more of a concentration on political activism per se; now I'm not speaking of yourself, but the kind of CAM experience in Race Today or whatever, & also some of the campaigning that goes on. Did art & culture remain important in that campaigning for example?

JLR: It was always here in London. For example: I became deputy chairman of the West Indian Student centre, where we met mostly. Aubrey had been there because he was still fed up over one of the parties run by the West Indian Governments. During that time there was a lot of activity stimulated by the presence of CAM at the centre, when we began to talk about the Black Education Movement & so on, it stimulated the students to get involved with it. There was a dance group and you know the poem by Okot p'Bitek called 'the song of Lawino'[?], they produced, I introduced the book to them, who Okot was, how important the book was. It's interesting how they did it, in a small room with no stage, & they followed it up with articles which we discussed: where you can make theatre, how you can make it: you can make it anywhere. Now they would have taken that out of the centre into various things that they were doing. For example, I became involved in establishing the South East London Parents Organisation (SELPO), which became involved in this political struggle in the area. Part of what they did was to write plays for this thing on the Police & so on. So the cultural activity was always part of what they were

doing. It was'nt something we organised, they organised: these organisations organised as part of what they had seen out of the expiecience of CAM, because CAM was interested in both, doing productions as well as discussing issues. It was very important to all those youngsters, they are now into all kinds of things in British society. An explosion of Black creativity took place, interestingly in the plays & the poetry,

JK: Particularly in the performance. The performance has been so important in poetry, in other contries too, Kenya, Peru, S.Africa, that includes the performance of writers.

JLR: With CAM, performance poetry began with Eddie's performance of 'rites of passage', it influenced a whole lot of that generation.

JK: I'm thinking of that time in Scotland, about Jim Haynes. There was a famous event at the Fringe Festival round about 61, when Trocchi& McDarmid met on the same platform, John Calder was involved - that kind of still gets discussed. I think Jim Haynes was directly involved in the organisation of the event.

JLR: We knew his paperback bookshop in Edinburgh & we knew of his work in Theatre, & then he comes down here with the Traverse to the Jenette O'Cochrane [?] Theatre. We had met him through Sarah's Father - who almost lost his job because he gave us a grant & Lord Goodman, the Chairman of the Arts Council did'nt like it - we found we had a common experience, he had grown up partly in Venezuala. He was also open to what we were doing.

JK: But it's the idea that performance is so crucial & when there is struggle, performance also becomes an exchange, that's also taking part in an experience within your own culture.

JLR: That's why the play is such an intimate connection. I remember a friend saying, 'why is it that you're not publishing more plays?' Plays are a very significant element of the interchange within the culture, a direct form of interchange. I said that I really hadn't thought of it in that way. we were having a big argument about it in Barbados - that book by Kole Omotoso on Caribbean Theatre - I did'nt realise that we had missed out in that kind of discussion about the immediacy of Theatre.

JK: I think it's important that plays are published, but you can't publish the performance of a play.

JLR: One of the things that happened in London that I recognised as an element of what had happened with us in Britain was this explosion of Black Theatre. It affected British Theatre in very significant ways, because there were these people meeting in small halls. That was what excited me about Jim's Theatre. All the plays he put on - we saw nearly

every one of them - were by living playwrights, which made it a very contemporary Theatre. Some of them became quite famous: that play Loot by Joe Orton, we saw it there where it was first produced. Jim told me he had made a mistake, he had'nt taken out all the rights, so when the play became famous & made so much money, they were'nt making the money they ought to have made. So when we heard Eddie reading 'rights of passage' I thought that this was the place where this ought to be produced & told Eddie. I did'nt know if I could produce a whole reading of a poem, but I knew Eddie would be a very powerful reader, so we could do a dramatisation & stage it at the Cochrane.

JK: Part of the objective part of the central things about the Lucks in bookwriting is this indigenous aesthetic, this validation of your own culture. There's all these different ways of talking: here's a writer, here's a poet & here also is a working language. All these things that say this is our culture, this is our language: we can discuss it, here are works, all of that. These things are central to a person becoming valid as a person. You can only do that once you've said - here's you're culture, you don't have to turn away in embarassment because you've met someone from you're own place, or someone stands up in public & reads something from you're own background, you're own culture. Whereas, part of the colonial experience - as it is in Scotland - is your taught to be ashamed of your own culture: you know - ~~interiorisation~~. inferiorisation. Thinking about that effect in the 70's, where that is part & parcel of the self-confidence of going in the street, of challenging authority & not being put down by authority: the right to self-defend. All these things become part of valuing yourself or your community.

JLR: You're absolutely right. The young people who became involved in all those struggles - there was a book on Althea Jones [?], she was doing chemistry, but she came out of the cultural experience in Trinidad, & she came to London & straight to CAM, she knew me from Trinidad, she came into a cultural & political situation she had come out of. She went & joined the UCPA which became the Black Panther Movement, by that time she became part of the Mangrove [?] Nine case. She was finishing a Phd thesis & she was a very powerfull orator. It was to them that John Berger gave the money when he got the Booker Prize - which made a scandal - they bought a house on Park Lane which they used as their headquarters. She came out of the same experience as myself where politics, art & culture were one holistic thing. I found it very difficult to understand the nature of artists in British society who somehow kept themselves away from these things.

JK: They're trained to, ~~they're trained to~~ separate them.

JLR: In a certain sense they become entertainers. you'd go to Opera or plays & I would talk, especially to the English elite, the first thing they would say is 'it was a success' or 'it was

interesting'. On the whole I noticed that the language was not an effective language of communication & interchange with the artist & his work. Not that they were'nt critical people, but they were critical people who worked for the newspapers: they were'nt prepared to commit themselves to an independant original opinion which they might have, which they should have about a work of art they'd seen on the stage, I was always freely commiting myself to what I thought.

JK: That's part of the education system, that you're taught not to do that. You are taught that personal experience & responses are invalid.

JLR: I would freely make a comment about how I saw it & try to engage the others about their feelings about it. I thought those things were important, not simply the intellectual presentation of it & the intellectual understanding, also their feelings, how they intuitively responded, intuition is so important.

JK: The intellectualisation is a rationalisation. That becomes a reflective thing anyway, you're moving right away from expieriences.

JLR: I always noticed people used these bland phrases about their experiences. In my view you could'nt really move your society with bland expressions, you had to really engage in a serious interchange between both individuals & social groupings. Within CAM we'd gone to the ultimate to do that with the people who were intimately involved with the work of CAM. The private sessions we called 'Warish' [?] nights - the kind of things the indians in the interior, the Pork Knockers, used for carrying heavy loads on their heads.

JK: I was thinking here of the seperate way in which art & politics are. It's interesting the way that art is devalued because of that: this kind of disinformation that the function of art is basically decorative or whatever. Even within the left that's the case, so that art generally is devalued from within the left, because it's regarded as being predicated on the fact that it is not political; unless it is a kind of 'well here's political art' & 'here's still life'. It's really weird but of course it's part of the education process anyway.

JLR: As I told you about Venezuala, they were all political people, all very artistic, cultural people, so that all these things had been interconnected all the time in their life experience on a daily basis. It was'nt something they'd seperate one from another for particular occasions, because politics is so much part of the experience of life it means that with the intimate experience of politics you're also experiencing life in a particular way. My subsequent understanding of it is that people bring to politics what they are. They can't bring anything else. So if you're a highly

developed person, you bring that to politics, whatever way you're developed you bring that to politics. There's nothing idealistic about politics, in that sense you know there's nothing idealistic about politics. There's a phrase, 'come the revolution'. I say there's nothing like that, it's everything you like. My argument is the very opposite: it was the very process by which we live & so that makes this continuing constant process. There's no end or beginning in a revolutionary process: it's a continuing process.

JK: These kind of statements are made, people say things so they don't have to examine reality. It's always been beyond me the way people can say that art has been divorced from politics. It's as if they'd never looked at what's in front of their nose. So many writers talk about: 'well you can't change things, nothing gets affected by what a writer does'. If we look at the opposite side of the coin, lets look at the negation of that. Lets take countries that are in struggle, people who are in struggle: what do the governments there do to their writers & artists ? We might well say that artists & writers don't affect things, but the right-wing don't think that - Christ they kill them!

JK: ...early Reggae, Rock Steady, Ska and all that, & the subversive qualities of that. Gordon Weller talks about it in terms of language: the actual language that people are using is so creative.

JLR: It's all there in the language of the Kiasos & in the language of the Reggae, of all these popular arts & songs. the songs retain that tradition longer than the political experience, long after people have forgotten what Burns said & why he said it, they're still singing the songs. And it's important that we try to understand what these songs were in their context, because it gives us a reference with this changing human experience. I know that because it's so pronounced in the Kiaso. The Kiasonians themselves were from the working class & their focus is from within the working class looking at the rest of society, from within the experience from below.
We did'nt begin to study what the British did in the 1930's until recently: how they were seeing us, what we were doing to counter British oppression & colonialism & it showed what all the different groups of the working class were doing at that period. There were three people, the Govenor & one called Nankidell [?], although he was Colonial Secretary he seems to have been a radical & he met with the people. Now when the General Strike, uprising & insurrection took place in Trinidad, he was looked at by the Colonial Office as the guy who was behaving properly & eventualy he was sent away after the strike - to Cyprus - I found that interesting because another guy came over & he made a statement about oil & the fact that the Oil

Companies had been saying the oils not going to dry up - they'd been saying that it would dry up for the last 20 years & he too was sent to Cyprus. A researcher told me that Nankivell died on a train and I said 'MI6 pushed him off', I feel absolutely certain that MI6 did it to him, he was part of the movement in the 30's & the Colonial Office was very annoyed with these Trinidad Administrators who couldn't handle the strike well enough for them. Susan Craig writes about this in ' Smiles & Blood'. There we were looking at how they were responding to us & the movement for the transformation of Caribbean society & against Colonialism & the British connection in that particular period. what in my view is significant is that it shows the creativity of ordinary people in society. People don't look at creativity as political creativity, they see it only in terms of cultural creativity: the writers, the artists. But when you look at what that ~~that~~ creativity is, especially in the case of the Caribbean in the 30's, it's working people who learn how to understand colonial experience, who find ways, all kind of ingenious ways of dealing with that situation, confronting it & winning battles against it.
But a significant section of that grouping - there's a group which Malcolm X & people like that come out of, in the States - these are semi-unemployed or unemployeds & they become highly articulate, highly creative in terms of how they organise other people. That happened here in 81 with the Brixton riots, the rising. The people who took on the Police were'nt people who were active political people, they were ordinary people whose sense of Britain was a sense of tremendous oppresive Police action in the area; plus all kinds of social oppressions from school to unemployment & so on. They took on the Police in a very military way: they would attack then retreat, then simply disappear and that's how the unemployds behaved in the Caribbean in the 1930's.
So I understood that creativity does not simply mean a writer or a musician. Creativity means social creativity as well, which involves all these people whom people regard as the 'ordinary zero' in society, who are so creative in ordinary ways of ordinary existence for that matter.

JC: Again it's just t is disinformation that is ~~s~~aight the way through our society. People are taught to think of themselves as being a zero: that you're part of the 'lumpen proletariat'. Even activists, they have this debate about. Again it's like what's in front of your nose, look around, the Poll Tax or whatever the experiences are that ordinary people are doing. with the forces of the right there is a need to always have an infiltrator. In Scotland recently with Timex, the quality sunday papers made such a great play about it :'its Militant or the SWP', it would not allow the Timex workers the right ti think for themselves: 'they're being led by the nose, all the things that occur, occur because of these infiltrators' - its the old state propaganda about Ho Chi Minn or something.

JLR: That creativity is something that we got to look at. I could introduce that, I was very familiar with it much more than Andrew. It was for us a total education, what is this creativity & how this creativity operates within societies & how it changes a culture. How does it move a culture into different kinds of areas which previously it had not attacked. For example, these black youngsters here in London who say 'Self-defence is no offence', it was their slogan & 'come what may we're here to stay', it was their slogan I didn't invent it. Their parents weren't saying that, I belong to the parent generation. I always knew I could go back to the Caribbean if I wanted. Even those who'd come with the intention of going back in 5 years, when Powell came along & said, 'You'll all have to go', talking of repatriation & so on: they had to face up to the reality of their situation in Britian some of them took the money & went back home. The youngsters, they're the ones who faced up to the Police in Brixton & everywhere in London, the Police were framing them up all over the place. These slogans, 'come what may we're here to stay' were their slogans, it also affected how people in France thought, they began to say 'Je suis je reste';'I am here & I remain here'; this ordinary creativity.

JR: That could take you quite nicely into carnival.

JLR: Carnival is that kind of activity as well, again you couldn't study Kiso, Carnival & Kiso went together. What is interesting about Carnival - in Trinidad it is similar to Brazilian Carnival - what is common to all of these is a certain Catholic relationship with the Africans within their culture, the place they find themselves, Brazil, Louisiana, very Catholic countries. What they do is they creatively respond to that. Because the Carnivals that these others brought was an end to the flesh, sin & so on: it comes before Lent, 2 days of total & absolute abandon, Lent comes & for 40 days & you're supposed to be repenting in the flesh with physical & mental flagellation. So you have 2 or 3 days of total abandon, now that's the Carnival & you're on the streets. At that stage the white people introduced that of their tradition into the Caribbean, in Trinidad & in the other islands who had some French connection. So the Africans entered into that in the 1830's because they are now free, & they re-interperate that in terms of their own festival experience, which is drum, singing & so on: in Africa there are a lot of pray-songs but there's other songs, other traditions, where you sing songs about what you don't like & what's bothering you, the song that satirizes what is in society & that's what the Africans re-interpecate.

JR: Just as an aside, I was also thinking of these Soweto singers. In all the Townships there'd be these variety events, where these popular events would have singers singing satirical stuff, things about local people, anecdotal even.

JLR: This appears in the Carnival. Now what they call 'Jonove', [?] daybreak: it usually began on the Sunday night, the field slaves would march through & terrify the town. They would do that because they were re-enacting their loves theatrically & musically in the Carnival, in the road on the streets. Now that led to the riots in the 1880's & the British suppressed the carnival, which is very like what I see in the Carnival in London, I see the connection there very easily. So they suppressed & regulated the Carnival, instead of it starting in the night & terrifying people - they would have also had torches, that was the danger - they were in the streets, enacting their past and as a result of that these riots happened. They regulated the sunday night, started it at 6 in the morning until the night. The Carnival has this revolutionary tradition. Its popular creativity has been immense, with everybody doing what they can in the situation, music, dance, sound & the organisation. So the Carnival is all that plus its the greatest popular festival which incorporates most of the society for 3 or 4 days.

Then there's the carnival that begins after Christmas, with the Kiasonians in their tents, where the Kiasonians are moving the population, it's preparing the people for Carnival with all these songs about what's going on in society, with all these political comments, all these Tribunes. Especially at the stage before 1935, when we had the first elections in Trinidad, even up to the 40's; there were two main aspects of the Kiaso which were very pronounced: first, the Kiasonian as Tribune, speaking for the people because there was no elected representitive till 1946. So from the Kiasonian as Tribune out comes all the grievances & all the problems & aspirations of the working class. Then there is the Kiasonian as Entertainer: that was becoming more pronounced after the 40's, after the war, when we were moving towards Independence; and with all the Americans who came to the country, people were entertaining them for the kind of money they never got before.

These two traditions intertwine & one of them is more dominant than the other at particular phases in the life of the Kiaso. The Kiaso is what presents the whole situation & creates the atmosphere for the Carnival, that begins right after Christmas & continues up to the Carnival. In the earlier days the Chanter of the Kiaso, the singer, was in the band & the band was chorus: so it was really a very communal experience & that's what makes Carnival a very strong tradition. What makes people stronger is that the bands were completely autonomous. Each band choses to play what it wants to play, how it wants to play, who is going to sing what song - nothing to do with any other band or the government or anybody else - it is totally autonomous creative expression. All the creativity in the population - in the kinds of costumes they would make, what colours they'd use - is totally autonomous: it's a very democratic tradition, very anti-authoritarian. This is another aspect of the question, that makes carnival such a dangerous thing, nobody asked the Police when they went into a group & wanted to play Carnival, they simply went on the road. It was

such a normal thing to do in the Caribbean & they won that right, there's a Kiaso about it, 'The road made to walk on Carnival Day, the road is ours'. All these governments recognise how dangerous it is, people on the streets are always dangerous to governments anyway. The time when Fidel Castro made an attack on Moncada [?] to attack Battista on July 26th it was the moment of Carnival in Santiago, with all these massive amounts of people on the streets, there's always that danger with Carnival.

JK: One of the things Tarlochan was discovering on his degree course is that there is no right to do anything else when you're on the streets other than to get from A to B. You don't have the right to be in the street. You have the freedom to assemble but there's no right for it. I was also thinking of Breach of the Peace. Theoretically if the POlice exercised the powers that that they have - as far as i read it - they could charge every single person at any time of the day, even being asleep, with breach of the Peace. And if the full weight of that was ever attempted by the State, it would be a total revolution to everybody, it would be finished in a day. I think the exaaple of Carnival demonstrates that. You were talking about how people were scared of this thing. It reminded me of the time when 20,000 people marched to London, bringing the city to a halt, I always have this image of the guys in Bowler Hats saying "who's this coming over the bridge!"

JLR: The day of Action for the Newcross massacre, 2nd of March 1981. I will never forget that. It was something that had'nt happened since the Chartists. People had not marched across London into the City. We had to negotiate with the Police - I'd chair the meetings - and that came from within the Black People's Assembly. People would be saying: "Man we have got to do something about this thing - the Police can't get away with this thing!", that kind of talk went on. And we said yes we'll go on a march. "Where are the guns!", that kind of talk, "We want some guns!". And I said "Have you heard of a man called Brigadier Kitson, Low Intensity Operations. If you have'nt read his book then you should read it. Because if you're talking about going to Parliament with guns you have to take on Kitson". He had been the commander in Northern Ireland, he was G.O.C. in Britain. I said "lets talk seciously, you're starting at the end, lets start at the begining". We had that sort of interchange all the time at the meetings, very open free meetings. So they said OK we'll go on a march. We said well what day are we going to march? Because the normal marches took place on a Sunday, when nobody's working, everyone's home. The people said that they wanted it to be on a day when the British are bound to take notice. So what day? We had to disrupt British society, that was absolutely clear, that's what we were saying in that movement. We wanted to snarl-up traffic all over London.
So we decided it must be a Monday, that came from within the audience. We wanted to make this place realise that we're

serious & we're going to disrupt the whole of British society. We didn't going to work that day. We had been talking about the question of a Black general strike since 64, that was highly impractical at that time, but the idea was there.

We had already had the experience of the first demonstration of about 2,000 outside the house, the Sunday after the event, we stopped there for hours, the Police couldn't move them us from the street. We disrupted the traffic coming from the south, they were trying to move us but they didn't dare, they could see people were going to burn down the place or something. It ended peacefully & people went away. But on the other day, when we met with the Police from the City of London as well as the Metropolitan Police. One guy, Superintendant Paul Kinghorn [?] - a funny name - came with a map & told us where we could go & so on. I said "you listen carefully, we have decided that the route we're going to take is the route, & we're going as far as Blackfriars Bridge. We have to have a further meeting of the Assembly, & when we're finished with that, we'll come back to you again and tell you where we want to go". Paul Kinghorn had never met people talking to him quite like that. He was trying to intimidate us, the man from the City never said a word during the negotiations that we had. Then we told Kinghorn, "If you don't take us seriously - you are just the Police - we are a political grouping, if you don't understand that we will deal with the Home Secretary not with you. So the next time you come to negotiate, you better bring someone with authority", that's what we told him.

The next time they brought the Deputy Assistant Commissioner & his Aide. By that time we had finished the second part of the route. But the route he wanted to take us was different. The police are very informed, & we learned a lot about negotiating with them. The Police never tell you what their own plans are, they only want to know what your plans are.

What demonstrations in the past usually did was to march on Hyde Park into Whitehall. We said we were going to go where the people are going to know that this is happening - we're going to march in all those areas before we come into Blackfriars Bridge. That way you're going to hit the city with all those people who are really concerned about what's happening in the whole Newcross area & then march through the City & terrify the place.

JK: It's amazing how people allow demonstrations & marches to be totally controlled. In Glasgow they allways take them on a Saturday in a quite part of Town. It's crazy, they've allowed the agenda to be set about the nature of their protest. In Britain most of the organisers of these things are all part of the official Labour movement. They deal with the Police all the time, they negotiate with the system. It's actually just a total contradiction...

JLR; We were confronting the system, quite deliberately & clearly. I had to go to the House of Commons because of what happened - they did nothing about it. We saw them the day

before the demonstration & they said 'why don't you stop at the House of Commons sitting that day, to show how you felt about those people who were killed'. They then put on an Early day Motion, about what had happened.

JK: It may be quite important since not a lot of people know, that with the Newcross massacre 13 Black Teenagers were killed and no one has been charged with this thing 12 years later.

JLR: We could benefit from our experience. Michael Mansfield was involved in that case & we were handling most of the major cases of that kind at that particular stage, dealing with those major cases ourselves.
What had happened was that the Police were trying to pin the event on some youngsters who were at the party, because of that we were able to prepare ourselves for the Inquest. Because of our experience in fighting all those cases prior to 81, we knew how the Police handled those cases in court & in Inquests. It is the Police who decide what is the evidence before calling an Inquest. We had to prepare ourselves & get collecting the evidence ourselves. We collected evidence from people who were themselves involved at that party, we had a lot of evidence to give to our Lawyers, so they weren't relying on the Police even in the evidence, they could question the Police. The Police were rotten throughout all that business, the Coroner behaved abominably, the whole Press saw it. Because of the kind of influence we had we got the inquest held in the Chamber of the GLC, it lasted for 13 days.
So that evidence that they were trying to pin on those boys - this is what they had done in other cases, the Guilford 4 & so on - they failed in doing that, they spent about £250,000 doing that, they had about 50 Policemen doing that. Having done that, saying that these are the boys who did it, they couldn't come back now & say who else did it. When we went to Court again, about this particular matter, they admitted they'd been wrong trying to pin it on the boys: but they had no further evidence to apply as to who else may have done it. They never pursued it. But what they weren't able to do is what they had done in the case of the Guilford 4 & others.

JK: Thinking again about these fights against racist violence, the brutalities. What in effect the campaigning group was doing was of course the Police work, and they also have to go & get the evidence because it's already been decided what it is. The first thing they always say is 'it wasn't racist'. Thinking again about that way of confronting, where it becomes a genuine protest, the other thing is you have to break the law - in the sense that any campaign, if you're going to do it properly - because it's always in their power to do you for Sub Judice or hold that up.

JLR: I had some legal training in Trinidad. I'd come here to study law but I abandoned it within the first year, nevertheless I knew a lot about law. So here I knew what you

had to do to present statements about your case in order to validate the Sub Judice rule. Darcus knew, he'd trained in law as well but hadn't practised it. We were also dealing with most sympathetic lawyers, most lawyers who you deal with in these matters want to control it themselves & we knew much more about these matters than they knew. We also knew exactly the line of defence you've got to take in the cases & we won most of them.

So coming to that inquest in 81, the Newcross massacre, we were really much more prepared than any other grouping in British society would have been to handle that inquest. That is why we were able to defeat the Police; because they went all out to show politically, that what this group of people were saying from the beginning was not true; that the people who had done it were the boys themselves at the party — that's the line they were feeding the Press at the very beginning, that's how the press reports these matters: the Police give them the information & they report it. But we had a strategy to deal with that, we formed our own independent commission to investigate this particular matter, and we also fed things to certain members of the Press about what was happening. So it meant that there was a counter to the general Police media strategy. We countered it ourselves in the radio & so on. The Police didn't have as free a sheet as they would normally have had in dealing with a political matter of this kind. The other important factor was that because we understood the Inquest, we knew that it was there they'd make their stand to publically denegrate all that had happened, all that we'd done: the Black People's Day of Action, the previous demonstration, the campaign we were organising. Therefore we knew we had to prepare for that Inquest very carefully to counter their influence, and we did.

They were really encountering a different kind of political process from what they were normally accustomed to, when they walk through the thing. Everyone benefited from the experience that we introduced into this way of handling these matters. Because after that all kinds of groupings knew how to handle these matters. We made our way, our method of dealing with these matters as widely understood as possible. People were ringing us from Bradford, Manchester, Birmingham, all over the country, & we'd go & help them to organise their cases. We got involved in teaching them how to do it; that's another aspect of creativity that people don't really take as creativity. It is creativity.

JG: Again, our system is designed to do the opposit . It's designed that you don't do that, that you give it to this guy who gets paid £50,000 a year, & he goes & talks your politics for you.

JLR: It was very much part of what we understood to be what a popular movement has to do. It teaches people how to organise themselves so they become part of their own independant autonomous organisation for taking on these matters. After a

time I don't have to go there at all, they know it through themselves.

JK: It's the opposite of a vanguard in that sense.

JLR: That's right, they understand what they will do themselves and they will do it. What happens with that experience, with all the ultra-leftist organisations like SWP, where we're making something they're not accustomed to make...

JK: They can't cope with it.

JLR: No they can't cope with it. They couldn't cope with us during that Newcross campaign or any of the major campaigns like the Christopher Daliels [?] case or loads of other cases.

JK ---- What about the visual Arts? ----

JLR: We were all interested in the visual arts, some of us were practitioners like Carl Craig [?], he went back and became Head of the Jamacian School of Art. So we had all that experience, were very vitally concerned about it & interested in it. Unlike the other arts: plays, poetry etc; I thought that the articulation of ideas & theories about art was very limited within CAM. What I discovered really was , we had not done for the visual arts what we had done for plays & so on, where a serious kind of discussion went on that was another aspect of the activity. Trinidad was awash with it because Carnival is fashion art, it's a day of art with all kinds of artistic creations on display, yet we never had the same kind of theoretical discussions as with other things.

JK: Again it's one of these equivalent points about the indigenous art forms from the indigenous culture. All these questions had been raised to do with, 'what should I paint in the painting'to show his/her commitment.

JLR: It's a hangover from the question of the role of the artist in society, from art for art's sake till the question, for example of art in the Soviet Union, Social Realism.

JK: I've heard artists themselves, where this danger of the perscription was one of the things they were aware of, 'that's perscription', writers & artists should be involved with the struggles of the people. There's that quote about figuration being missionary art.

JLR: That kind of discussion went on, although not to the same intensity in the public events in CAM, it took place in the private events which doesn't figure in the documentation.

JK: That was actually the bottom line, of initiating CAM anyway - primarily as a place where artists can talk together.

JLR: Yes but it's not on the record. When you ask what it is that we'd discuss on Marishee [?] nights, the only answer is about everything, and it went on for hours, like we're talking now - that's what made it so important for the artists in the long run - obviously the artists were'nt really creating in those nights. The artists were still taking back to themselves whatever creative ways they could view that experience, to create both in theory & in practice. I understood that in politics things go like that too, you have periods of intense creativity, so I knew it would happen in the cultural experience we were having as well. I did'nt expect it to last forever. I expected it to last as intense as it was, then it would go away. It bonded us in a very important way, Andrew, myself, all the people who were part of that experience, immediately part of it. It lasts forever, really, it has bonded us in a very significant way. It doesn't impinge upon anybody's autonomy, but nevertheless it has a deep inter-relationship, which does not require a lot of restatement of things really.

JK: I think that's a good place to stop, a nice way of putting it.

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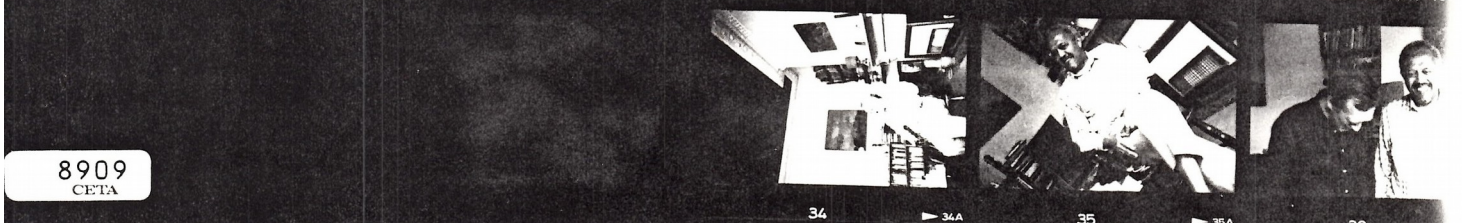

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John La Rose interviewed by Jim Kelman.

Jim Kelman: One of the important things in the formation of the Caribbean Artist's Movement was the centrality of the individual aesthetic, to have criticism coming from your own culture and your own community. I regard that as fundamental in the way one talks about culture and politics and that's the sort of question which shows in fact that there's no separation.

John La Rose: For me publishing is an important element in the autonomy of culture. It meant that prior to our work in print, people were published abroad by English publishers. We believed that we ought to be able to publish our own material if it's important to our own culture. I really began to recognise the autonomy of publishing validating a culture for itself. In Trinidad - we had no money - but there were all these people publishing small books and pamphlets, literature, poetry, short stories and so on, and of course there's still a lot of that in the Caribbean, what people called self publishing or samizdat.

...In the early Fifties, I was in Venezuela, and that was a great influence on me: seeing how artists and writers there could do things for themselves and how essential it was that they should do it. At that time in South America and in Central America, there were two main publishing centres, one was in Mexico City and the other was in Buenos Aires. There were no other, so if you were a Spanish/American writer you'd be either published in Mexico or Argentina. Having seen all this my idea was we should really get into publishing ourselves. But I couldn't quite do it at first because we didn't have the money.

...I came here in 1961 and got a job as a brickie's labourer. On one job I fell off a platform, almost broke my back. I'd worked as an insurance executive in Trinidad and organised the whole case for compensation and took it to the solicitors who acted on my behalf. Eventually I got a bit of money in an out of court settlement, and so with that, which was around £500, I began publishing. The first book was my own called 'Nations', which cost around £300.

JK: Who else was involved at the time?

JLR: It was really a coming together of three people who were really devoted to writing about Caribbean culture and the society and so on: Eddie Kamau Brathwaite, Andrew Salkey and myself. When I first came here I met Wilson Harris and one of the things I remember talking to him about was that I thought there was a need to bring artists and writers together, because there was so many of them around in Britain. Eventually when I met Eddie in 1966 and talked about this we both agreed upon it immediately. I said I knew Wilson and C L R James extremely well personally and Andrew Salkey who was working at the BBC as a freelance.

JK: Salkey had this wide extensive network.

JLR: Especially because of his work at the BBC in the Caribbean Service. We're talking about 1966 here, four years after the independence of Jamaica and Trinidad. The modern Caribbean has to be seen in terms of the struggle between 1935 and 1938. I was very much part of that understanding of it politically, in the way that Andrew and Eddie were not, but they were quite willing to understand it in all its particular nuances. In our study groups we had gone into all the details of 'Labour in the West Indies' promoted by Arthur Lewis Warner, who won the Nobel Prize, we knew of our own battles in

the 40's and it was only ten years after that we were involved in a massive struggle ourselves. But going through the thing we saw all the details of those struggles of the unemployed and the workers, we'd work out theoretically that these things begin with the unemployed who are in direct confrontation with the State, and subsequently the organised workers get involved in those struggles, it's not the other way around. Because of that theoretical position, which we'd learned from 'Labour in the West Indies', I understood it here in relation to black unemployed and the State, the white working class and the black working class in British society. So we were able to transfer our understanding of that experience in the Caribbean to our understanding of politics in Britain. The notion of the lumpen proletariat is wrong and whatever Marx may have said, people are not that. They are a very active source of struggle and change in all societies - we saw it in France, in the Caribbean and later on, for example, in the big revolts in Martinique. It started off with a white guy killing a black worker or something like that - that's how it starts - that was a tinderbox of racial resentment of unemployment and so on, like in Ireland.

...When you live in a colony like we lived, you have a high percentage of permanently unemployed, and I learned a lot about that because it is they who created the Black Autonomous Church that challenged the established Church in the Caribbean.

...There was a lot of experience flowing into CAM and it was very significant because of the fact that this was a movement that sought to deal with the artist as a totally vulnerable person engaged with other artists in a very vulnerable way; and that kind of engagement had been unusual in Caribbean society and that made the experience extremely valuable in elucidating our own lives as individuals and as artists, as people involved in politics and so on. Cabral says, 'it begins with culture and it ends with culture', and we did that with CAM, in the sense that it was a cultural subject of discussion, but it took in everything so that when we had a private discussion subsequent to the public one, we would need to talk about literature, politics, music, culture, everything in society. And in talking about everything we were exploring ourselves, exploring society and societies. Coming from the Caribbean you had a really great experience of diverse societies: in Trinidad: we have the Chinese, the French Creoles who came with the French Revolution from within the Caribbean to Trinidad, we have the Spaniards who had been the original conquerors of the Indians in Trinidad, we have the English who took over from the Spaniards, then we have the Africans who were brought to work on the plantations. I grew up seeing Syrians selling cloth and I went to school with them, all these people which meant you were really familiar, I'm very familiar with Indian society, I have a feeling of growing up with it, that's what's so peculiar about it all. I was taught by an Irish priest, he taught me Greek at St. Mary's College in Trinidad, I hadn't known white people attacking other white people, but here was this man attacking the English for the Black and Tans - he was obviously an Irish Nationalist - I didn't know that white people could talk about other white people like that, the idea was that it was black people who were like that, you know, "black and chicken can't do nothing", those kind of self deprecatory, self-contemptuous sayings which have been imposed on society. The revolutionary movement and the cultural movement weakens all these things, all the time, everytime it moves forward - it shows that it's not true: we can do these things, we can deal with the British. 1903 was a situation where we almost had power in our hands in Trinidad. The place where the Government had its seat of power, the Red House, it was totally burned down in the riots, the government was tarred. There's a kiaso about it.

JK: So publishing was a way of reclaiming a radical history as well as your own history within it?

JLR: That was very much part of what we were doing, we were doing it very actively as a political movement involved in popular culture. Popular culture in Trinidad, the Kiasos in particular, do make reference to all these events in our society.

JK: What about the role of Working Men's Associations and the Labour Movement. They have played a crucial part in the education of the working classes in the west: you had those in various places, London, Glasgow and New York - books were available so you could go in there and read things.

JLR: Ours had been the Trinidad Working Men's Association, which subsequently became the Trinidad Labour Party. I knew all that history extremely well, both in terms of oral history and I also made a special study of it in our Libraries, we had a Trinidad Public Library since 18 something: they had the West Indian section in the public library - that's where the West Indian books were kept!

JK: We have Scottish sections in our Libraries and bookshops in Scotland just now, they actually genreize our own culture. We have been talking about the autonomy of New Beacon. There's a kind of related thing that I've found exciting. Besides being a publisher and writer you're creating a whole autonomous community - you have the publisher, the writers, and with luck a sympathetic printer, you have the shop to sell the work so you are creating your own customers. So there's a complete self-sufficiency within this and this in a sense is the ideal.

JLR: My going into book publishing was not by chance but the question of book selling was, partly because of the fact that here in London there was no place I could not buy any of the books I wanted to read. So I decided at some stage that we would really do the international book service, which was the very first book service of its kind ever done from the Caribbean. People came to here all the time, this was still in the 60's, people came to downstairs here in this house where we are talking now. The book selling was partly encouraged by CAM because at that stage there were new writers being published every now and then. Some of the sessions involved discussing the new work, some of the session might have been private but it was always a free autonomous thing. It's a question of interacting with ideas and personalities. People should not suppress what they think for this or that reason. Encouraging free and open discussion was a very important part of what we were doing. And in a certain sense you're making yourself vulnerable by discussing all you think personally, your own feelings, which is important for the artist - to talk about your feelings and intuitions as well. It allowed for the 'free development of free individuals', which is a famous Marx phrase, that's what was happening within CAM.

JK: What about the visual arts?

JLR: We were all interested in the visual arts, some of us were practitioners like Carl Craig, he went back and became head of the Jamaican School of Art. So we had all that experience, were very vitally concerned about it and interested in it. Unlike the other arts plays, poetry etc; I thought that the articulation of ideas and theories about art was very limited within CAM. What I discovered really was, we had not done for the visual arts what we had done for plays and so on, where a serious kind of discussion went on that was another aspect of the activity. Trinidad was awash with it because Carnival is fashion art, it's a day of art with all kinds of artistic creations on display, yet we never had the same kind of theoretical discussions as with other things.

JK: Again it's one of these equivalent points about the indigenous art forms from the indigenous culture. All these questions had been raised to do with, 'what should I paint in the painting to show his/her commitment.

JLR: It's a hangover from the question of the role of the artist in society, from 'art for art's sake' to the question, for example of art in the Soviet Union and of Social Realism.

JK: It is one of the things that many committed artists are aware of, that of the 'prescription mentality' and the issue of artists being involved with the struggles of the people. There's that quote about figuration being missionary art.

JLR: That kind of discussion went on, although not to the same intensity in the public events in CAM, it took place in the private events which doesn't figure in the documentation.

JK: That was actually the bottom line, of initiating CAM anyway - primarily as a place where artists can talk together. Would that be one of the reasons why it was so attractive to so many people ? One of the things again that I found exciting about it was the cross-generational thing: you had the young Ngugi, Linton Kwesi Johnson and Darcus Howe, a lot of young people, and you also had C L R James being excited by it, who was 40 or 50 years older. Thinking about the kind of influence you can infer about what Ngugi has been doing in and out of Kenya, and also what L K Johnson was doing in his poetry, and also moving into the 70's, the different things they were involved in having derived in a way from much of the ideas and interplay of CAM - cultural activists; but also there was the political side after CAM terminated.

JLR: Linton was involved with CAM in a way that Darcus wasn't, they became involved with us post-CAM, but they understood and valued the experience.

JK: Which also includes an organising capacity, seeing an organising potential and strategy. What's important with CAM, and an aspect which is underestimated in most cultural work is the organising - you're bringing this tremendous organising experience from various things, which is crucial. The origins of CAM were coming from three different countries basically, so you're bringing a whole range of different ways of working in comparison. I felt in my own case, that organisation was missing in Scotland. There was a lot of tentative good things going on. You had writers conferences in the mid-70's, various things were happening in the 60'. But these organisational and comparative things: this crucial thing about how do things go on in other societies, what these people have been involved in. All these things are so necessary.

JLR: Correct and it really takes politics, culture, social life into one...

... There was a common experience coming from those countries from where the CAM members came from, which had to do with the fact that we were colonial territories of Britain, fighting against British colonial domination, what we called battleship democracy. We were all anti-assimilation, and none of us were starry-eyed about Britain. I knew a lot about British history, I was anti-colonial. I knew of Churchill and his corruption and all his family in the cabinet, things of that sort. There's nothing here to impress me. I was very detached, looking to understand more of this colonial experience out of British society. I made contacts as you know, from the top to the bottom of British society. Just like I did when I lived in Venezuela. I mean I had meetings with the President right down to the bottom of the people, I had all these connections, because I genuinely wanted to understand the nature of this colonial experience and how it had affected us and colonial societies, culturally, politically, socially in all kinds of ways; and what that interaction means, and we were doing all that here, exploring all of that all the time within CAM - exploring it in terms of the writers and their writing, the artists and their art.

JK: I was just thinking of moving back into the post-CAM period. There was a good statement you made: 'the time is over, there was a communion, we shouldn't worry about that, that's how it goes, there's something else we can develop - the embers from the fire'. I'm looking from the outside but

there seems to have been more of a concentration on political activism per se; now I'm not speaking of yourself, but the kind of CAM experience in Race Today or whatever, and also some of the campaigning that goes on. Did art and culture remain important in that campaigning for example?

JLR: It was always here in London. For example, there was a lot of activity stimulated at the West Indian Student Centre, where we met and where I was deputy chairman and where Andrew was based. That was where we began to talk about the Black Education Movement and so on, it stimulated the students to get involved with it. There was a dance group and they produced a piece based on a poem by Okot p'Bitek called 'The Song of Lawino'. It's interesting how they did it, in a small room with no stage, and they followed it up with articles which we discussed, questions such as where you can make theatre and how you can make it, the answers to which are anywhere and anyway. That influence would then be taken out of the centre into the various things that they were doing. For example, I became involved in establishing the South East London Parents Organisation (SELPO), which became involved in the political struggle in the area. Part of what they did was to write plays for this thing on the police and so on. So the cultural activity was always part of what they were doing. These organisations organised as part of what they had seen out of the experience of CAM, because CAM was interested in both, doing productions as well as discussing issues. It was very important to all those youngsters, they are now into all kinds of things in British society. An explosion of Black creativity took place, interestingly in the plays and the poetry. With CAM performance poetry began with Eddie's performance of 'Rites of Passage', it influenced a whole lot of that generation.

JK: The performance has been so important in poetry, as in other countries too, Kenya, Peru, South Africa, that includes the performance of writers. The idea that performance is so crucial and when there is struggle performance also becomes an exchange, that's also taking part in an experience within your own culture.

JLR: That's why the play is such an intimate connection. I didn't realise that we had missed out in that kind of discussion earlier on about the immediacy of Theatre.

JK: I think it's important that plays are published, but you can't publish the performance of a play. This brings us back to the indigenous aesthetic, this validation of your own culture. There's all these different ways of talking: here's a writer, here's a poet and here also is a working language. All these things that say this is our culture, this is our language - you don't have to turn away in embarrassment because you've met someone from you're own place, or someone stands up in public and reads something from you're own background, you're own culture. Whereas, part of the colonial experience - as it is in Scotland - is that you're taught to be ashamed of your own culture, you know, inferiorisation. Thinking about that effect in the 70's, where that is part and parcel of the self-confidence of going out in the street, of challenging authority and not being put down by it, the right to self-defend.

JLR: There was a book on Althea Jones, she came out of the cultural experience in Trinidad, and she came to London and straight to CAM, she knew me from Trinidad, she came into a cultural and political situation she had come out of. She went and joined the UCPA which became the Black Panther Movement, by that time she became part of the Mangrove Nine case. It was to them that John Berger gave the money when he got the Booker Prize - which caused a scandal - they bought a house on Park Lane which they used as their headquarters. She came out of the same experience as myself where politics, art and culture were one holistic thing. I found it very difficult to understand the nature of artists in British society who somehow kept themselves away from these things.

JK: They're trained to separate them.

JLR: In a certain sense they become entertainers. You'd go to Opera or plays and I would talk, especially to the English elite, the first thing they would say is 'it was a success' or 'it was interesting'. On the whole I noticed that the language was not an effective tool of communication and interchange with the artist and the work. Not that they weren't critical people, but they were critical people who worked for the newspapers: they weren't prepared to commit themselves to an independent original opinion which they might have, which they should have about a work of art they'd seen on the stage, I was always freely committing myself to what I thought.

JK: That's part of the education system, that you're taught not to do that. You are taught that personal experience and responses are invalid.

JLR: I would freely make a comment about how I saw it and try to engage the others about their feelings about it. I thought those things were important, not simply the intellectual presentation of it and the intellectual understanding, also their feelings, how they intuitively responded. You couldn't really move your society with bland expressions, you had to really engage in a serious interchange between both individuals and social groupings. Within CAM we'd gone to the ultimate to do that with the people who were intimately involved with the work of CAM.

JK: It's interesting the way that art is devalued because of that: this kind of disinformation that the function of art is basically decorative or whatever. Even within the left that's the case, so that art generally is devalued from within the left, because it's regarded as being predicated on the fact that it is not political; unless it is blatantly 'political art' or is obviously 'still life'.

JLR: Politics is so much part of the experience of life it means that with the intimate experience of politics you're also experiencing life in a particular way. My subsequent understanding of it is that people bring to politics what they are. They can't bring anything else. So if you're a highly developed person, you bring that to politics, whatever way you're developed you bring that to politics. There's nothing idealistic about politics. There's a phrase, 'come the revolution'. My argument is the very opposite: it is the very process by which we live that makes this a continuing, constant process. There's no end or beginning in a revolutionary process.

...People don't look at creativity as political creativity, or as the creativity of 'ordinary people' in society - they see it only in terms of cultural creativity and in terms of the writers and the artists. But when you look at what that creativity is, especially in the case of the Caribbean in the 30's, it's working people who learn how to understand colonial experience, who find ways, all kind of ingenious ways of dealing with that situation, confronting it and winning battles against it. A significant section of that grouping - there's a group which Malcolm X and people like that come out of in the States - are semi-unemployed or unemployeds and they become highly articulate, highly creative in terms of how they organise other people. That happened here in 1981 with the Brixton riots, The Rising. The people who took on the police weren't active political people, they were ordinary people whose sense of Britain was a sense of tremendous oppressive police action in the area; plus all kinds of social oppressions from school to unemployment and so on. They took on the police in a very military way: they would attack then retreat, then simply disappear and that's how the unemployeds behaved in the Caribbean in the 1930's. So I understood that creativity does not simply mean a writer or a musician. Creativity means social creativity as well, which involves all these people whom other people regard as the 'ordinary zero' in society.

JK: In Scotland recently with the Timex dispute, the 'quality' Sunday papers made such a great play that

"it's Militant or the SWP". They would not allow the Timex workers the right to think for themselves: "they're being led by the nose, all the things that occur, occur because of these infiltrators"

JLR: That creativity is something that we got to look at: what is this creativity and how it changes a culture. For example, these black youngsters here in London who say 'self-defence is no offence' and 'come what may we're here to stay', it was their slogan. Their parents weren't saying that, I belong to the parent generation. I always knew I could go back to the Caribbean if I wanted. Even those who'd come with the intention of going back in 5 years, when Powell came along and said, 'You'll all have to go', talking of repatriation and so on: they had to face up to the reality of their situation in Britain some of them took the money and went back home. The youngsters, they're the ones who faced up to the police in Brixton and everywhere in London, the police were framing them up all over the place. Those slogans also affected how people in France thought, they began to say 'Je suis je rest', I am here and I remain here. This is ordinary creativity.

JK: This reminds me of the time when 20,000 people marched to London, bringing the city to a halt.

JLR: The Day of Action for the Newcross massacre of 13 black teenagers, 2nd of March 1981, I will never forget that. It was something that hadn't happened since the Chartists. People had not marched across London into the City. The meetings came from within the Black People's Assembly, which I chaired. People would be saying: "Man we have got to do something about this thing - the police can't get away with this thing!", that kind of talk went on. And we said yes we'll go on a march. "Where are the guns!", that kind of talk, "We want some guns!". And I said "Have you heard of a man called Brigadier Kitson, Low Intensity Operations. If you haven't read his book then you should read it. Because if you're talking about going to Parliament with guns you have to take on Kitson". He had been the commander in Northern Ireland, he was GOC in Britain. I said "lets talk seriously, you're starting at the end, lets start at the beginning". We had that sort of interchange all the time at the meetings, very open free meetings. So they said OK we'll go on a march. Because the normal marches took place on a Sunday when nobody's working, we decided it must be a Monday because we wanted to disrupt British society and show that we were serious. We wanted to snarl-up traffic all over London. On the day we met with the police from the City of London as well as the Metropolitan police. One Superintendent came with a map and told us where we could go and so on. I said "you listen carefully, we have decided that the route we're going to take is the route, and we're going as far as Blackfriars Bridge. We have to have a further meeting of the assembly, and when we're finished with that, we'll come back to you again and tell you where we want to go". This Superintendent had never met people talking to him quite like that. He was trying to intimidate us, the man from the City never said a word during the negotiations that we had. Then we told him, "If you don't take us seriously - you are just the police - we are a political grouping, if you don't understand that we will deal with the Home Secretary, not with you. So the next time you come to negotiate, you better bring someone with authority". The next day they brought the Deputy Assistant Commissioner and his Aide. By that time we had finished the second part of the route. But the route he wanted to take us was different. The police are very informed, and we learned a lot about negotiating with them. The police never tell you what their own plans are, they only want to know what your plans are. Demonstrations in the past usually marched on Hyde Park into Whitehall. We said we were going to go where the people are going to know that this is happening - we're going to march in all those areas before we come into Blackfriars Bridge. That way you're going to hit the city with all those people who are really concerned about what's happening in the whole Newcross area and then march through the City and terrify the place.

JK: Demonstrations and marches are totally controlled. In Glasgow they always take them on a Saturday in a quite part of town. The agenda is set about the nature of the protest. In Britain most of the

organisers of these things are all part of the official Labour movement. They deal with the police all the time, they negotiate with the system. It's actually just a total contradiction...

JLR: We were confronting the system quite deliberately and clearly. I had to go to the House of Commons because of what happened - they did nothing about it. We saw them the day before the demonstration and they said 'why don't you stop at the House of Commons sitting that day, to show how you felt about those people who were killed'. They then put on an Early Day Motion, about what had happened.

... We could benefit from our experience. Michael Mansfield was involved in that case and we were handling most of the major cases of that kind at that particular stage, dealing with those major cases ourselves. What had happened was that the police were trying to pin the event on some youngsters who were at the party, because of that we were able to prepare ourselves for the Inquest. The police were rotten throughout all that business, the Coroner behaved abominably, the whole Press saw it. Because of the kind of influence we had we got the inquest held in the Chamber of the GLC, it lasted for 13 days. So that evidence that they were trying to pin on those boys this is what they had done in other cases, the Guildford 4 and so on - they failed in doing that, they spent about £250,000 and had about 50 policemen doing that. They admitted they'd been wrong trying to pin it on the boys, but they had no further evidence to apply as to who else may have done it. They never pursued it. No-one has been charged 12 years on from that incident.

JK: What in effect the campaigning group was doing was of course the police work, and they also have to go and get the evidence because it's already been decided what it is. The first thing they always say is 'it wasn't racist'. Thinking again about genuine protest is that you have to break the law because it's always in their power to do you for Sub-Judice or hold that up.

JLR: I had some legal training in Trinidad. I'd come here to study law but I abandoned it within the first year, nevertheless I knew a lot about law. So here I knew what you had to do to present statements about your case in order to validate the Sub-Judice rule. We were also dealing with most sympathetic lawyers, most lawyers who you deal with in these .matters want to control it themselves and we knew much more about these matters than they knew. We also knew exactly the line of defence you've got to take in the cases and we won most of them. So coming to that inquest in 81, the Newcross massacre, we were really much more prepared than any other grouping in British society would have been to handle that inquest. That is why we were able to defeat the police; because they went all out to show politically, that what this group of people were saying from the beginning was not true: that the people who had done it were the boys themselves at the party. That's the line they were feeding the press at the very beginning, that's how the press reports these matters: the police give them the information and they report it. But we had a strategy to deal with that, we formed our own independent commission to investigate this particular matter, and we also fed things to certain members of the press about what was happening. So it meant that there was a counter to the general police media strategy . We countered it ourselves in the radio and so on. The police didn't have as free a sheet as they would normally have had in dealing with a political matter of this kind. The other important factor was that because we understood the Inquest, we knew that it was there they'd make their stand to publicly denigrate all that had happened, all that we'd done: the Black People's' Day of Action, the previous demonstration, the campaign we were organising. Therefore we knew we had to prepare for that Inquest very carefully to counter their influence, and we did. They were really encountering a different kind of political process from what they were normally accustomed to, when they walk through the thing. Everyone benefited from the experience that we introduced into this way of handling these matters. Because after that all kinds of groupings knew how to handle these matters. We

made our way, our method of dealing with these matters as widely understood as possible. People were ringing us from Bradford, Manchester, Birmingham, all over the country, and we'd go and help them to organise their cases. We got involved in teaching them how to do it, that's another aspect of creativity.

JK: Again, our system is designed to do the opposite - that you give it to this guy who gets paid £50,000 a year, and he goes and talks your politics for you.

JLR: It was very much part of what we understood to be what a popular movement has to do. It teaches people how to organise themselves so they become part of their own independent autonomous organisation for taking on these matters. After a time I don't have to go there at all, they know it through themselves.

JK: It's the opposite of a vanguard in that sense.